



**Testimony of Lance Johnson
AARP Volunteer Chairman for Health and Supportive Services
Select Committee on Aging
February 16, 2010**

Good morning Chairwoman Prague, Chairman Serra, ranking members Kissel and Frey, and members of the Select Committee on Aging. My name is Lance Johnson and I am AARP's volunteer advocacy lead on Health and Supportive Services. AARP is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization that serves people 50 and older. We have approximately 40 million members nationwide and over 600,000 in Connecticut.

On behalf of AARP members in Connecticut, I want to express AARP's support for:

- H.B. 5110, An Act Concerning Criminal Background Checks for Employees of Homemaker-Companion Agencies and Home Health Agencies
- S.B. 103, An Act Concerning Access to Comprehensive Factual Information Regarding Long-Term Care Facilities
- H.B. 5108, An Act Increasing Temporary Family Assistance Benefits for Grandparent and other Nonparent Caretaker Relative

AARP Supports H.B. 5110, AAC Criminal Background Checks for Employees

AARP supports H.B. 5110. The bill takes steps to protect individuals in home-and community-based settings by enhancing a system of criminal history background checks. These background checks would apply to homemaker-companion agencies and home health agencies. Penalties would apply to any prospective employee who makes a false statement regarding his or her prior disciplinary record. A system of criminal background checks is especially critical, given the mobility of today's workers, the turnover in the long-term care workforce, and the fact that it is not unusual for individuals to work in multiple states.

AARP Supports S.B. 103, Which Will Require Nursing Facilities to Provide Comprehensive Factual Information about the Quality of Care at Their Facility

Consumers need timely and accurate information about the quality of care in nursing facilities, so they can make informed choices about their care. The information provided should be clear, accurate and easy to understand. Done well, the requirements outlined in S.B. 103, can provide additional tools for consumers and potentially provide an incentive for nursing facilities to improve their quality.

AARP believes that providing a written copy of the "nursing home bill of rights," which also includes additional factual information relating to: staff to patient ratio for all units

on all shifts, the facility's use of the most appropriate and best practices, the facilities current state license status and the facilities quality rating as determined by CMS (CMS Nursing Home Compare and Five-Star Rating System), would greatly improve the ability of consumers to make informed decisions. Admittedly, the CMS Five-Star Rating System is not perfect, and AARP continues to work at the national level to improve the system. Yet, the rating system is a valuable tool that provides relevant information in a consumer-friendly format, especially when paired with other information.

Taken as a whole the additional, factual information provided by S.B. 103, would increase access to a nursing facility's quality measurements and allow consumers to exercise informed choice. Plus, the requirement to provide a written copy of the nursing home bill of rights will ensure that all residents are adequately informed of their rights. Without knowing what exactly their rights are, individuals living in a nursing facility are less able to assert those rights and demand the quality of care they deserve.

AARP supports S.B. 103 and urges this Committee to vote favorably on the measure.

AARP supports increasing TFA benefits for relative caregivers (S.B. 5108)

Grandparents raising grandchildren have an unwavering commitment and love for their grandchildren. Even when others may have given up, these grandparents step in to provide a home for their grandchildren. Their value is incalculable. The most recent U.S. Census numbers show that approximately 19,000 Connecticut residents care for grandchildren. If just a fraction of these grandparents chose to give up their responsibilities, the cost of Connecticut's child-care resources would increase significantly.

Grandparent caregivers deserve our thanks for their generosity and selflessness, but more importantly, grandparent caregivers and the children they raise deserve our *support*. Unfortunately, the current system allows wide disparity among grandparent caregivers, based solely on the way in which a grandparent received guardianship. Currently, the financial support that grandparent caregivers are entitled to is not based on income or the child's need. S.B. 5108 addresses the inequity in the current system and helps ensure that all relative caregivers have the support and resources they need to raise healthy, hopeful children. AARP thanks members of this Committee for raising S.B. 5108; we ask each member to support efforts to equalize the funding and support for grandparent caregivers.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time today. AARP looks forward to working with members of Aging Committee to tackle these important issues. We stand prepared to offer policy suggestions, provide best practices used in other states, and communicate information to our members. Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.